



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 7 December 2023

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
KEY DECISION:	N

SUBJECT: Early Years and Childcare Sufficiency 2023

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To advise the Council's Executive Board of the outcomes of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023 in respect of the Local Authority's statutory duty under The Childcare Acts 2006 and 2016.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:
Notes the content of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2023.

3. BACKGROUND

A Childcare Sufficiency Assessment is a detailed investigation and measurement of the nature and extent of the need for, and supply of, childcare within each local area.

The Childcare Sufficiency Assessment should not only look at the current position, but also have regard to trends or developments that are likely to affect demand and supply in the foreseeable future e.g. new housing developments or increases in childcare provision that may impact negatively on the childcare market due to over saturation. The assessment should be kept under regular review to ensure that any assumptions remain robust and valid.

At the point of undertaking this assessment the Government's plans for Expanded Early Years Entitlements and the Pathfinder for Wrap Around Childcare had not been announced. Officers are currently working to understand the impact of these new entitlements for families and providers (including schools) in respect of supply and demand.

1. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

Supply

The childcare sufficiency data shows that there is a plentiful supply of available early education and childcare places across Blackburn with Darwen for children aged birth to 8+ years to meet current demand, although the availability of places does vary across wards.

In the Summer term 2023 the vacancy level was 16%, compared to 18% as at Summer term 2022. This decrease is attributable to a reduction in the total number of early year's places available. Whilst this decrease lends itself to an overall improved position for the borough compared to the previous year, the percentage of vacancies remains a concern and may lead to financial instability for some early year's providers. The service will continue to undertake a termly review of the vacancy levels across the borough to monitor any significant changes.

In comparison to the same time last year, Local Education Authority (LEA) Maintained Nursery Schools, Nursery Classes and Children's Centres have seen the greatest increase in the numbers of places occupied. The Private, Voluntary and Independent nursery sectors have remained similar to the previous year.

At a ward level, 7 wards have a healthy supply of places, this is the same as last year. There are 4 wards (Billinge & Beardwood, Roe Lee, Darwen West and Wensley Fold) that currently have an undersupply of available places, however their respective neighbouring wards have a significant oversupply of available places.

From the responses received, the provision of out of school childcare places for children of statutory school age appears plentiful. However, the assessment did not elicit enough responses from the out of school provider sectors to robustly understand the true levels of supply. This will be addressed in the Spring term 2024.

Demand

Based on the responses received, 48% of parents stated that they are aware of the Ofsted rating of the providers that they use. Of those that are aware 44% stated that the Ofsted rating of the provider influenced their decision on which providers to use.

The move to home based/hybrid working has seen parents request more flexible childcare provision. 24% of parents/carers however reported that they needed more flexibility in the times of the day that childcare is available.

Whilst a small number of early year's providers have a waiting list for families requiring a place, this is due to parental preference of wanting a place at a specific early year's provider rather than lack of available places across the borough.

Free Funded Early Education places

The take-up of two year old free funded early education places has increased on the previous year. As at the January 2022 census count, Blackburn with Darwen had a take up rate of 69%. The take up rate in January 2023 census increased to 73%.

According to the January 2023 census, take-up of the three and four year old early education places was 96% which is an increase of 3% on the previous year.

Quality

Early education and childcare providers in Blackburn with Darwen continue to provide a high quality service. Of the early education and childcare settings that have been inspected by Ofsted, 96% have been rated as good or above compared to 95% in the previous year. 91.3% of LEA maintained Nursery Schools, Nursery Classes and Children's Centre nurseries are rated as Good or above by Ofsted, this is down from 100%. The service will continue to work in close partnership with early education and childcare providers to support the continuous quality improvement of our childcare provision.

Early education and childcare providers in Blackburn with Darwen report that they are struggling to recruit and retain staff, this is similar to recruitment issues being faced by many professional sectors. 71% of Local Authorities reported in the 'Coram Family and Childcare - Childcare Survey 2023' that it

was 'very difficult' for providers to find qualified or experienced staff and a further 19% reporting that it was 'somewhat difficult'.

Childcare costs

The average costs of a full time childcare place (50 hours per week) in Blackburn with Darwen for children aged 0 – 4+ years remains lower than the England and regional averages as reported in the 'Coram Family and Childcare - Childcare Survey 2023'. However, for children aged 3 -4 years, the cost of a 50 hour childcare place in Blackburn with Darwen is slightly higher than the regional average. The average cost of after school care at an out of school club or childminder for children aged 5+ remains slightly higher than the regional average but lower than the England average.

Childcare continues to be a significant percentage of family expenditure that the vast majority of parents/carers report they would like to see reduced. 76% of those parents that use childcare indicated that they consider childcare difficult to afford. The service will actively promote the financial support available for parents, carers and families who choose to use formal childcare.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Carrying out this assessment supports the Council in fulfilling its statutory duty under the Childcare Acts to regularly assess the demand for, and availability of sufficient childcare for working parents in our area. It also enables the Council to be satisfied that it is fulfilling its duty to secure sufficient childcare in its area for working parents and those making the transition to work.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Childcare sufficiency forecasting will continue to be met through existing resource.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

Early years and childcare provider sectors are consulted on a termly basis in respect of childcare sufficiency data.

For the purpose of the annual assessment, consultations were distributed to:

- Childcare providers across the maintained, private, voluntary and independent (PVI) childcare sectors
- Parent/carers

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Sara Malone , Pupil Place Planning Coordinator Sarah Anderson, Place Planning and Admissions Coordinator
DATE:	10 th November 2023
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Appendix 1 – Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Report